Research Proposal of the Thesis Entitled

Cultural Memories of Hindu Mother Goddesses & their Sacred Ornaments in Ancient Indian Sculpture particularly the Maurya - Sunga period.

Submitted by

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INTRODUCTION

The traditional ornament and adornment of Mother Goddesses in India is rarely simply decorative and is imbued with inherent meaning / symbolic value. These often act as a metaphorical language communicated from the goddess to the viewer. These Adornments emerge from a vast repository of symbolically significant forms and imagery - some literal, some subtle, and some whose meaning is lost in Antiquity.

The jewellery worn by mother goddesses in ancient India holds immense cultural and symbolic significance, reflecting the rich artistic traditions and beliefs of the Maurya (322-185 BCE) and Shunga (185-73 BCE) periods. These ornaments adorning the divine feminine figures were not mere decorations, but were imbued with profound religious and socio-political meanings.

The literature review reveals several potential avenues for further qualitative research to deepen our understanding of this subject matter and its enduring impact on artistic and cultural traditions.

This research tends to demonstrate the importance of a core cultural memory of mother goddess revitalising the historical and cultural legacy of our civilization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Maurya (322-185 BCE) and Shunga (185-73 BCE) periods in ancient India witnessed a flourishing of jewellery making, with a remarkable diversity of styles and techniques. Jewellery during this time served not only as adornment but also held symbolic and ritualistic significance (Untracht, 1997). Archaeological excavations and literary sources from this era offer valuable insights into the profound significance of jewellery adorning these goddess figures. Sculptural representations from sites like Bharhut, Sanchi, and Amaravati offer visual evidence of the intricate jewellery adorning mother goddess figures during this period. The Stupa of Bharhut by Cunningham (1879) and Bharhut Sculptures by Sharma (1994) document the remarkable craftsmanship and symbolic motifs present in these jewellery pieces.

Two of the most comprehensive accounts of Maurya-Shunga jewellery include one provided by Kālidāsa, the renowned Sanskrit poet, with vivid descriptions of the lavish jewellery worn by royalty and nobility during this era (Kālidāsa & Devadhar, 1967).

Another comprehensive account of jewellery in this period is found in Kautilya's Arthaśāstra (Kauṭiliya, 2003), which details the taxation and regulation of goldsmiths and their creations. This text, along with the Bṛhat Saṁhitā by Varāhamihira (1946), provides descriptions of various ornaments, including necklaces, earrings, and diadems, often associated with women and deities.

Archaeological excavations, particularly at sites like Taxila, Bhir Mound, and Ahicchatra, have unearthed a wealth of jewellery specimens, including necklaces, earrings, bangles, rings, and hair ornaments (Chakrabarti, 1997). These artifacts showcase the technical mastery of ancient Indian goldsmiths, who employed techniques such as granulation, filigree, and repoussé work (Untracht, 1997).

The Maurya period saw the development of the distinctive punch-marked coins, which were often repurposed as jewellery pieces, either in their original form or melted down and recast (Bose, 2015). The Shunga period witnessed the emergence of the Indo-Greek style, which was a symbiotic combination of Indian and Hellenistic influences, resulting in intricate designs and motifs (Chakrabarti, 1997).

Scholars like Banerjea (1973) and Rao (1985) have extensively studied the development of Hindu iconography, including the representation of mother goddesses and their symbolic associations. The depiction of jewellery on these figures was not merely decorative but were imbued with profound cultural and religious meanings.

Untracht's seminal works, Jewelry: Concepts and Technology (1982) and Traditional Jewelry of India (1997), provide invaluable insights into the techniques, materials, and cultural significance of ancient Indian jewellery, including those associated with mother goddess figures.

The symbolism of gemstones and motifs found on these jewellery pieces is explored in works like Bhushan's Masterpieces of Indian Jewellery (1979) and Chandra's Indo-Greek Jewellery (1979). For instance, the swastika, a prevalent motif, represented good fortune and prosperity (Untracht, 1997).

Mother goddess figures were not only revered but also embodied the concept of fertility and abundance, as highlighted in studies by Agrawala (1965) and Ghosh (1967) on ancient Indian art and murals. The lavish jewellery adorning these goddesses symbolized their divine status and power.

Symbolism played a crucial role in ancient Indian jewellery, with certain gemstones and motifs carrying specific meanings and associations. For instance, the swastika symbol, which predates its controversial modern connotations, was a prevalent motif in Maurya-Shunga jewellery, representing good fortune and prosperity (Untracht, 1997).

The literature on ancient Indian jewellery from the Maurya-Shunga period reveals the complex layered interconnections between the symbolism and iconography of mother goddesses and the Jewellery that adorned them. These ornaments were vessels of deep cultural, religious, and artistic significance, reflecting the rich traditions and beliefs of the time (Banerjea, 1973; Chandra, 1979; Rao, 1985; Untracht, 1997).

The Maurya-Sunga period stands as a testament to the rich cultural heritage and artistic prowess of ancient Indian jewellery making, with a diverse range of styles, techniques, and symbolic representations that continue to influence contemporary designs.

RESEARCH GAP

From the literature review, the following 3 research gaps are noticed:

a. Regional Variations and Influences**:** While the existing literature covers the general representation of mother goddesses and their jewellery, there is scope for more in-depth, region-specific studies to understand how different cultural and artistic traditions across various parts of ancient India influenced the designs, symbolism, and iconographic meanings of the jewellery depicted on these goddess figures.

b. Socio-cultural and Ritual Contexts: The existing literature primarily focuses on the religious and artistic aspects of mother goddess representations. However, a deeper exploration of the socio-cultural and ritual contexts during the Maurya-Shunga period could provide valuable qualitative insights into how these factors shaped the production, use, and symbolic significance of the jewellery associated with these goddesses, particularly among different social strata and in various regional traditions.

c. Comparative Studies: Comparative qualitative studies between the jewellery depicted on mother goddess figures in ancient India and similar representations from other ancient civilizations could shed light on potential cultural exchanges, cross-cultural

influences, and the universality or uniqueness of certain symbolic elements or design motifs.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

This research examines Maurya-Śuṅga period (3rd-1st c. BCE) Indian jewelry through its function beyond adornment as a medium encoding cultural and spiritual significance

1. To analyze the iconographic and symbolic representations of Mother Goddesses in Ancient Indian jewelry design during the Maurya (322-185 BCE) and Shunga (185-73 BCE) periods. Focus on their role in shaping cultural and religious practices.

2. To explore the interplay between royal and non-royal jewelry traditions related to Mother Goddesses, assessing how different social strata engaged with these divine representations through adornment.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Addressing these qualitative research gaps has the potential to contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the jewellery worn by mother goddesses in ancient India, its symbolism, and its enduring influence on artistic and cultural traditions. This research can also provide valuable insights into the socio-cultural, religious, and ritual contexts that shaped the production, use, and significance of these ornaments, and their lasting impact on contemporary artistic and design practices.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive qualitative research design is adopted by this study to analyze in depth the iconographic representations of mother goddess figures in Maurya-Śuṅga art (c. 3rd century BCE to 1st century BCE)

The qualitative data collected will be analyzed using a combination of interpretive and analytical techniques:

1. Iconographic Interpretation: In-depth analysis and interpretation of the visual representations of mother goddess figures and their associated jewellery, focusing on the symbolic meanings, cultural associations, and artistic influences.

2. Textual Analysis: Detailed examination and interpretive analysis of ancient Indian texts to unravel the descriptions, symbolism, and ritual significance of the jewellery depicted in association with mother goddess figures.

3. Contextual Analysis: Interpretation of the cultural, social, and religious contexts surrounding the production, use, and significance of mother goddess jewellery, drawing insights from various interdisciplinary perspectives.

4. Interpretive Synthesis: Integration of the various qualitative findings to develop a comprehensive, in-depth understanding of the significance of mother goddess jewellery in ancient India and its enduring impact on artistic and cultural traditions.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

1) Research examines iconographic analysis of mother goddess figures in Maurya-Śuṅga art, focusing on symbolic elements and attributes in visual representations.
2) Study investigates cultural and religious symbolism through specific attributes including fertility symbols, jewelry, ritual gestures, and animal motifs that defined goddess iconography of the period

Descriptive qualitative research on the Mother Goddess of ancient India provides both deep insights and significant limitations. The Maurya Sunga society existed over 2,000 years ago. The cultural, religious, and social contexts of the period are only partially understood. One of the primary challenges of descriptive qualitative research lies in attempting to reconstruct these contexts without imposing modern frameworks.

India's long oral tradition, fragmented texts and limited number of surviving sculptures / artefacts offer incomplete evidence, while the paucity of direct voices introduces a separate set of challenges. Historical distance obscures cultural context and lends itself to interpretive subjectivity and overgeneralization. The organic evolving roles of mother goddesses combined further complicate analysis. These factors limit the depth and reliability of conclusions, necessitating cautious interpretation and acknowledgment of unfillable gaps in understanding of these divine mother goddesses.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The proposal seeks to fill gaps in understanding the symbolism in indigenous jewellery of the Indian subcontinent in order to decimate and value influence of Indian culture. A centuries old heritage of a people who are driven by a primordial impulse seeking to combine the divine with

the mother. This forms part of a spiritual experience and expression inherently rooted in craftsmanship/manual techniques.

This is the iconic perception of the goddess who nurtures, protects and sustains life. She defines beauty in the aesthetic conception of her form and its adornment. Her bangles for instance are the traditional signifier of marital status and indicate her duality as mother and consort. She is simultaneously the cause inspiration and aspiration for life.

FORMULATION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Questions

1. What are the recurring iconographic features of jewelry in mother goddess figures of the Maurya-Śuṅga period?
2. How do specific attributes of jewelry like fertility symbols, rituals, animal and floral motifs enhance the symbolic meaning of jewelry?
3. What socio-cultural and religious factors shaped the production and depiction of goddess jewelry during this period?

CHAPTER SCHEME

1. Chapter 1 Introduction emphasizes methodological framework alongside historical context to support qualitative research.

2. Chapter 2 focuses on literature review historiographical review and literary sources, crucial for historical research.

3. Chapter 3 maintains focus on research methodology but with emphasis on iconographic analysis & interpretation rather than just documentation and expands to include broader material culture context alongside jewelry analysis.

4. Chapter 4 deals with data analysis presenting the detailed analysis of the data collected for this study and seeks to demonstrate how answers to research questions emerge based on the collected data by strengthening the connection between cultural memory and religious narratives.

5. Chapter 5 Final chapter synthesizes findings in relation to the research questions and null hypotheses. Findings, conclusions and Recommendations "Comparative Analysis & Interpretation" which will:

This structure seeks to align with qualitative historical research methodology while maintaining focus on research questions about iconographic influence, ritualistic significance, and regional variations.

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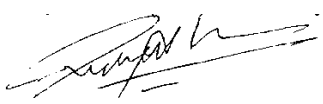

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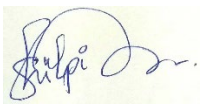

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